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ABSTRACT

In light of the increasing diversity of students and the sweeping changes involved in the inclusion movement, many special education administrators in small and rural districts are not prepared to face the emerging challenges and responsibilities of their role. The Institute for Small and Rural Districts was established in 1990 by the Florida Department of Education to provide technical assistance and training to administrators of special education in Florida's 27 small school districts. A needs assessment established that, of the 27 administrators in question, 11 had no prior special education experience and 16 had no prior administrative experience. In addition, inclusionary practices were affecting all districts, and time and distance constrained training possibilities. Extensive research and administrator input generated a ranked list of competencies and knowledge of program components essential to the incoming administrator. The first training was delivered to 54 educators at 5 sites via videoconferencing, supported by a resource manual given to all participants. Other videoconference trainings are planned. The Institute also found that principals required training in areas related to their support of special education programs, and such training was delivered at a site convenient to a cluster of 12 remote rural school districts. Appendices contain a list of administrator training components and competencies, a map of Florida school districts, and workshop evaluation summaries. (SV)

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ED 381 324

ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY TECHNIQUES FOR TRAINING AND INFORMATION DISSEMNATION FOR SMALL AND RURAL DISTRICTS

Educational administrators must perform a multitude of duties ranging from personnel supervision to student discipline to facilities management to instructional leadership. Performance of tasks associated with these responsibilities requires that they possess a wide range of management and leadership skills and abilities (*Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, 1988). Administrators today must also have an indepth knowledge of special education programs and services, limited English proficiency, instructional methodologies and a multitude of other areas for our changing and diverse population of students in schools. Through the inclusion movement and overall school restructuring, "the emerging paradigm, the perspective shift toward an inclusive school philosophy, is compatible with the underlying principles of the movement toward a general restructuring of education" (*Leadership in Educational Reform*, 1994).

In examining the situation, many administrators in small and rural areas are not prepared to face the challenges and responsibilities of their role as it has emerged. The Institute for Small and Rural Districts established in 1990 by the Florida Department of Education (DOE), Bureau of Student Services and Exceptional Education (BSSEE) has been attempting to address this issue particularly as it relates to exceptional education. The function of the Institute is to assist administrators responsible for exceptional education programs and services through the following:

- Provide a statewide network of technical assistance and services to small and rural district exceptional student education administrators in Florida.
- Share information and assist with current programmatic and functional concerns in rural exceptional student education.
- Maintain a database of district and other experts with unique expertise for rural service delivery.
- Coordinate with university training programs regarding coursework needed by small and rural district personnel.
- Assist with teacher recruitment and retention.
- Produce reports and disseminate resources and best practice information on topics and issues related to rural exceptional education.
- Sponsor distance learning opportunities and working meetings on issues related to small and rural exceptional education.
- Provide consultative networking, cross-district visitation, referral to appropriate sources, travel to model sites, and similar efforts.

The Institute began researching and gathering information to identify the gaps and assess the needs of the twenty-seven small districts across Florida. Several factors were essential to the development

RC 020045

of current activities now being provided by the Institute. The following are a few of the factors that were critical:

- Universities in Florida do not have any exceptional education coursework requirements for leadership or regular education programs of study.
- There are no state certification requirements for exceptional education administrators.
- Of the current twenty-seven ESE Administrators, eleven had no prior exceptional education experience.
- Of the current twenty-seven ESE Administrators sixteen had no prior administrative experience.
- Inclusionary practices are impacting all educators.
- Time to develop skills and attend training is limited and often inaccessible.

Two major activities currently in progress by the Institute to be discussed are competency based training for exceptional education administrators and training for school based administrators on exceptional education programs, services and methodologies.

Competency Based Training for Exceptional Education Administrators

Extensive research was conducted to identify competencies needed by exceptional education adminstrators. Information gathered included input from other states as well as research conducted by Donnie Evans, Debra Houston and Kathy Piechura, University of South Florida, 1992. Competencies were compiled and a task force of DOE/BSSEE staff, district exceptional education administrators with and without exceptional education experience, and Institute staff convened to review and refine the list of competencies. All twenty-seven ESE Administrators were then given the opportunity to provide input and rank those components and competencies most essential to an incoming administrator. (See appendix A for list of components and competencies.)

After considering all information, the first training developed was "Student Identification", delivered utilizing videoconferencing through the Florida Remote Learning System. A resource manual accompanied the training with information on eligibility criteria for all categorical programs in Florida, the prereferral/referral process, helpful hints, checklist for preparing and conducting a staffing, and resource information. Five sites were utilized across the state for the videoconference lessening travel time and expenses and allowing convenience for participation. (See appendix B for map of small districts and videoconference sites.) A panel of DOE/BSSEE staff was part of the training as well as a simulated eligibility staffing.

This mechanism for delivery allowed participation of fifty-four (54) administrators from small and rural districts. The cost analysis for the training estimated a savings of approximately $7,000 over a traditional training. Unlike other videoconferencing this particular system allows participants at all sites to interact visually and verbally with one another.

Evaluation results ranked the training content as well as the delivery mechanism as meeting participants' needs. (See appendix C for evaluation results.) The most frequent comments received in writing cited the helpfulness of the resource book (twenty-four) and reduced travel time as a benefit

of utilizing technology (twenty-seven).

Additional training plans are a second videoconference on "Utilizing Resources and Interagency Initiatives", Spring, 1995 and the Fourth Annual Summer Worksession, July 17th and 18th, 1995. The overall plan for delivery of training is three years with revisions to resource materials as information and requirements are modified. The majority of training will utilize the Florida Remote Learning System as the delivery mechanism.

School Based Administrators Training

The Leadership Training Institute at the University of South Florida funded by the DOE/BSSEE has provided training for administrators on legal issues for quite some time. It was found through inquiry, that very few of the small district administrators ever attended the training due primarily to inconvenience and time constraints. The training was set-up at a large city over several days. As we further surveyed the administrators, we also found there were other pieces of information, in addition to legal issues, they found necessary to be a support in their school for exceptional education programs and services. The Institute piloted the first in a series of trainings for "principals only" in a remote region of Florida with twelve (12) small districts. Sites were established so that no administrator would be required to drive more than fifty (50) miles to attend. The training proved to be a tremendous success. Principals liked having the opportunity to communicate with other principals, the convenient location, and the resource manual which accompanied the training. (See appendix D for evaluation results.)

With the success of the training, principals identified additional areas including funding, legal issues and instructional methodologies which they would like to receive via the regional concept. Trainings are scheduled for spring and summer, 1995. Other rural regions have requested the same training due to the reported benefits expressed by those administrators who received the training in the pilot stage. Those trainings are also scheduled for spring and summer, 1995.

As additional Florida Remote Learning System sites are established, training for school based administrators may be conducted utilizing this videoconferencing mechanism. The Institute for Small and Rural Districts is also collaborating with the Leadership Training Institute, University of South Florida regarding a Leadership Training design. Focus groups were conducted regionally to access needs by the Leadership Training Institute; data collected supported the information gathered from the small and rural districts.

Conclusion

Those who become administrators in school systems assume enormous obligations and responsibilities. The most important of these is to build a structure of relationships so all children have the opportunity to learn. In order to do this we must develop and use our professional knowledge and skills to create conditions in which each child can grow to his or her full potential and all children are given equal opportunity to succeed in our society (*Instructional Leadership*, 1989). The Institute for Small and Rural Districts is a support system which is working with district administrators to help build a structure and provide the support necessary to make a difference for exceptional education students. Small and rural districts do not have support services as readily available as urban districts. The Institute is responsive to this condition by seeking and providing opportunities through alternative methods of delivery and support.

Appendix A

ESE ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING
COMPONENTS AND COMPETENCIES

I. Program Development
   - A. Student Identification
   - B. Utilizing Resources and Interagency Initiatives
   - C. Infants, Toddlers and Preschool Handicapped
   - D. Individualized Education Plans and Family Service Plans
   - E. Regular Education Initiatives - Integrate Delivery Systems with Existing Basic Programs and Practices
   - F. Curriculum/Instructional Methods and Strategies and Technology
   - G. Program Planning/Coordination and Related Services
   - H. Community/Parent Involvement
   - I. Special Education Topics

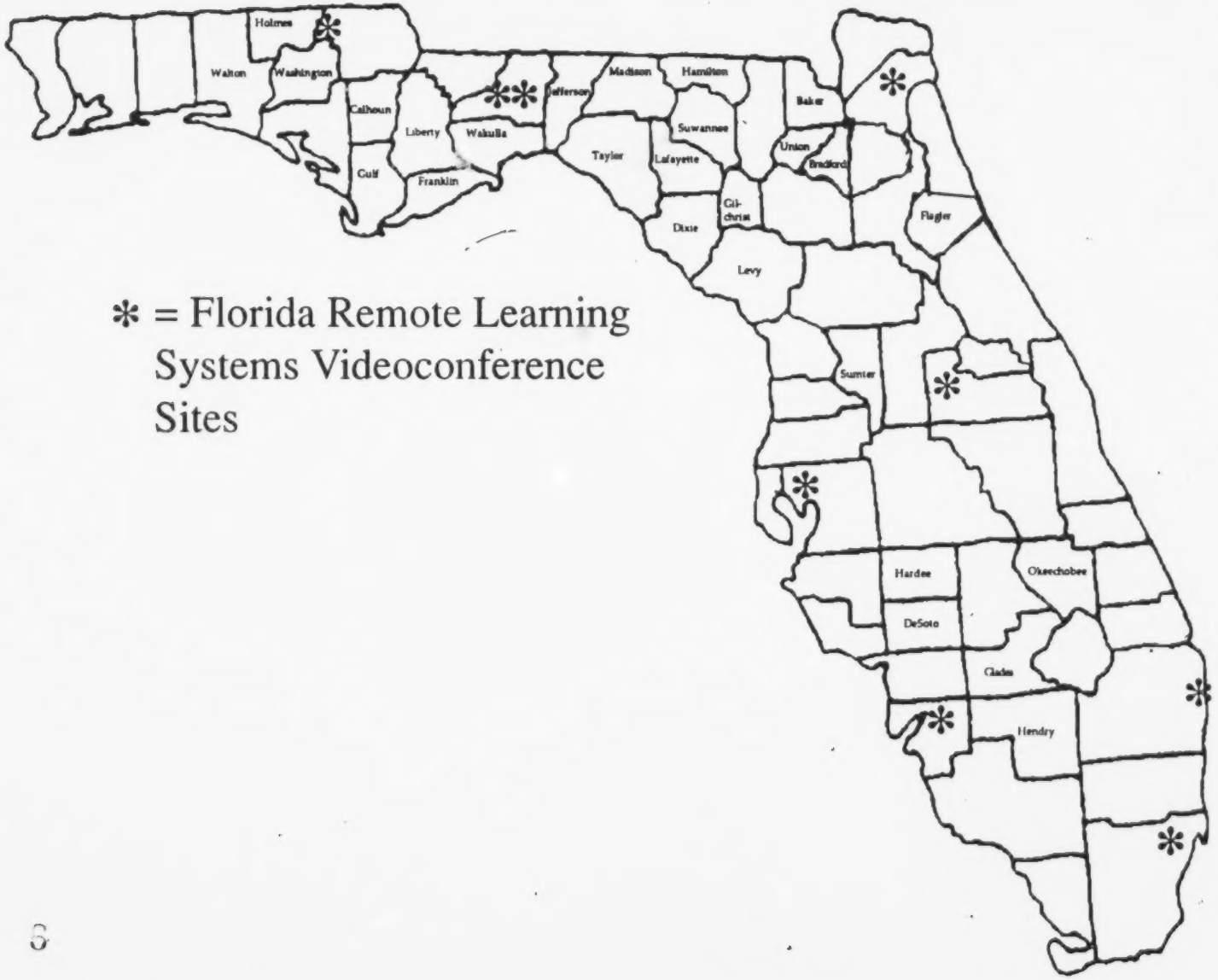
II. Leadership
   - A. Program Philosophy, Goals and Initiatives
   - B. Effective Communication/Public Relations
   - C. Leadership Models/Human Resource Development Management

III. Management
   - A. Personnel Recruitment/Selection/Certification/Supervision
   - B. Organizational Skills, Decision Making, Time, Stress and Change Management
   - C. Networking Systems and Services
   - D. Strategic Planning

IV. Legal
   - A. Federal Legislation/Current Trends
   - B. Federal/State Compliance Issues
   - C. Special Education Case Review
   - D. Preparing for Litigation/Proceedings
   - E. Least Restrictive Environment
   - F. Due Process and Complaint Procedures/Requirements

V. Fiscal Planning and Management

Institute for Small and Rural Districts



* = Florida Remote Learning Systems Videoconference Sites

Appendix C

INSTITUTE FOR SMALL AND RURAL DISTRICTS
ISRD/NEFEC

WORKSHOP EVALUATION SUMMARY

Name of Activity: ISRD ESE Administrators' Training

Location: Five Videoconferencing Sites

Date: January 13, 1995

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion/ Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The purpose and objectives were clear.	27 56%	21 44%			
2. The videoconference was an appropriate technique for this training.	32 67%	16 33%			
3. The resource manual is relevant and will assist me in my duties.	30 63%	9 19%	8 16%	1 2%	
4. The presentation was easy to understand.	24 50%	21 44%	2 4%	1 2%	
5. The program was informative.	30 63%	16 33%	2 4%		
6. The videoconference was well organized.	27 59%	19 41%			
7. Onsite facilitation of videoconference was appropriate.	32 67%	16 33%			
8. Sufficient time was allowed for a question and answer period.	21 44%	24 50%			
9. I feel prepared to apply what I have learned.	15 34%	19 43%	10 23%		
10. I would like further information on this specific area.	8 19%	14 33%	19 45%	1 3%	
11. I felt comfortable with this delivery method of training.	25 52%	20 42%	2 4%	1 2%	
12. I would participate in future videoconferencing trainings.	35 73%	12 25%	1 2%		

Appendix D

INSTITUTE FOR SMALL AND RURAL DISTRICTS
ISRD/NEFEC

WORKSHOP EVALUATION SUMMARY

Name of Activity: ISRD Principals' Inservice (ESE Characteristics and Inclusion)

Name of Consultant: Mary Ann Ahearn and Dennis Ehrhardt

Location: Poseys in Panacea and Camp Weed in Live Oak

Date: November 30th & December 1st, 1994

Total of 35 Responders

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion/ Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
1. The purpose and objectives were clear.	23 66%	12 34%				
2. The methods for instruction were appropriate.	20 57%	15 43%				
3. The resource materials were relevant.	27 77%	8 23%				
4. The presentation was easy to understand.	20 57%	14 40%	1 3%			
5. The program was interesting.	21 60%	14 40%				
6. The workshop was well organized.	23 66%	12 34%				
7. The consultant was aware of the needs of the group.	25 71%	10 29%				
8. I gained valuable information.	24 69%	11 31%				
9. Sufficient time was allowed for a question and answer period.	22 63%	12 34%		1 3%		
10. I feel prepared to apply what I have learned.	12 35%	17 50%	4 12%	1 3%		1 No Response
11. I would like further inservice on this specific area.	18 55%	14 42%		1 3%		2 No Response

REFERENCES

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, (1988).

Sage, Daniel D. and Burrello, Leonard C. (1994). *Leadership in Educational Reform.*

Smith, Wilma S. and Andrews, Richard L. (1989). *Instructional Leadership.*

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